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THE LITTLE GREEN GOD

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The
Little Green God

BY
CAROLINE ATWATER MASON



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*And one shall say unto him,
"What are these wounds in thine hands?"
Then he shall answer, "Those with which I
was wounded in the house of my friends."*

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A STRANGER

I

A STRANGER

A LARGE clerical gathering which had been convened for several days in that favorite convention city, Buffalo, was breaking up. The broad stream of outgoing clergy and laymen had poured through the wide-opened doors of the Stone Church and spent itself, leaving now but a few straggling individuals to depart one by one or two by two.

In the luxuriously equipped antechamber, into which the warm noon light struck richly through amber-colored glass, a few men still stood in groups. They were chatting cheerfully

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or button-holing one another with earnest looks and eagerly emphatic utterance, as they rehearsed the rulings of the convention and prophesied good or ill, each according to his turn of mind. The greater number of these men carried overcoats and travelling cases, and were evidently about to leave the city for their several homes.

Into this lobby, from an inner door, a man now came of an aspect strikingly different from his brethren. He was tall and lean, with a gaunt, sallow face, a pair of grizzled side whiskers worn too long, and a suit of faded black, also worn too long. It was difficult to say why, but the man's attire conveyed the effect of a paucity of linen. At least no superfluity was in evidence, while the men around him were noticeable for the immaculate quality and abound-

ing quantity visible. There were other points of difference. These men bore themselves with hearty assurance and confident though decent hilarity as they met. The newcomer looked about him with a vague and timid smile, which apparently finding no *point d'appui* seemed to fall at his own feet. He did not carry an overcoat, but the inevitable bag was in his hand; it was not, however, of the American, up-to-date, sole-leather variety—in fact, it could not strictly be called a bag. It was circular in form, made of tin, and painted brown, after a fashion common to the English travelling public. It might have been in commission twenty years, and was plainly English in its origin. On it was painted in black letters, Rev. Titus Fletcher, Haidarabad, India,

The newcomer placed this receptacle upon a chair, and rubbing his hands with an air of preparation for something of which he was altogether uncertain, glanced from group to group of those about him in a gentle and conciliating manner. His presence, however, did not seem to be observed.

Meanwhile, in the church within, where the convention had held its meetings, two men, the last to leave, were walking slowly down the aisle. The taller of these two, whose arm was thrown over the other's shoulder in affectionate familiarity, had served the convention as moderator. He looked born to moderate. He had the portly and gracious and impressive personality which belongs, in the American imagination, to the English duke; a fair, clean skin, well-cut features, and

smooth-shaven face, a benignant expression, white, well-kept hands, and a frequent smile, which was commonly alluded to by his friends as "in itself a benediction." At fifty odd, his teeth, his digestion, his self-confidence, and his orthodoxy were alike sound. This was the Rev. George Alexander, D.D., the popular pastor of a large and wealthy church in Cleveland. His companion, Irving White, a well-known editor, was a nervously organized man, famous for the pungent editorials which made his paper a species of denominational lash.

"The best thing about the whole conference, I tell you, Alexander," White was saying in a low voice suited to the place, "was the way you ruled out all those tramps and agents and special pleaders who usually bore us

to death. They are the bane of all our public meetings."

"I believe we did succeed pretty well in suppressing them," said the other, complacently; "I was sorry, though," he added, in a different tone, "for Fletcher. Poor old Fletcher!" and he sighed the rather comfortable sigh which a man sighs over his friend's adversities.

"Who's Fletcher?"

"Why, our returned missionary just come back from India, you know. A good deal of a wreck, I fancy. His wife died out there. Fearful climate. He was a classmate of mine in the old days at Williams."

"Oh, bless me, you don't mean the bilious brother?"

"Perhaps that is your description. An excellent man; a fine scholar, too,

he was always rated, and he has been a devoted missionary."

"Oh yes, of course; that's all understood—they all are. But that man! He has a certain pathos in his eyes to which I distinctly object—that look you have seen in the eyes of a dog whom you haven't treated well, but who persists in his affection for you. I've honestly spent half my time these three days in avoiding the appeal in that man's eyes. I can't stand him."

"Well, if he hadn't got off in such a hurry I should certainly have asked him to go home with me and address our people. It was cruel to have to sit down upon him, as it were, here,—my old classmate, you know, and the least I could do would be to take him home with me. I fancy he came to the conference hoping to make engage-

ments to speak for missions around in the churches. He has a lot of curios, I know, with him. Poor fellow! and now he is gone. It's a shame. Ah, White, these lost opportunities! But I suppose we are judged by the good we mean to do."

At this moment they had reached the church door. White pushed it open and they entered the vestibule together and stood face to face with the man with the small tin trunk. White noticed with a sardonic twitch of his mouth the first instinctive expression of dismay which Dr. Alexander promptly covered with his most benedictory smile as he hastened forward with outstretched hands.

"Why, Fletcher, my dear fellow! Then you are not gone yet? Good enough, good enough! I feared you

had slipped out of my hands, and I have been so busy that I have hardly had a chance even to greet you. This is surely great good fortune. How are you? I have a hundred questions to ask at once."

Titus Fletcher looked into his old friend's face, his own sallow visage illuminated with cordial and unaffected joy.

"George, I tell you this does me good! When a man has been out of the country twenty years, you know, till he feels more like a heathen than a white man, and hardly dares to expect his old friends even will remember him, such a greeting as this warms the very cockles of his heart."

Dr. Alexander beamed more and more joyously upon his old friend, stimulated, as most public speakers are,

by applause. "Now what is to hinder you going home with me? What are your engagements? I've been trying all through the meetings to get to you and claim a few days, but you saw how it was, pinned right to my place every minute. I suppose you have most of your dates filled; but now, say, really, why can't you come home with me and stay a few days?"

"Why, George, I don't know," and the other laughed diffidently. "Let me see, this is Wednesday. I have, it is true, a little interval before Saturday, when I have to be in Chicago, but I don't like to intrude on your family without warning. Your good wife may have other arrangements."

"Not at all, not at all; no intrusion, my dear fellow!" exclaimed Alexander, registering automatically a reflection on

Mrs. Alexander's cordial dislike of being styled his "good wife"; "we entertain constantly at our house, and some way, we get a good many distinguished foreigners," and he laughed pleasantly. "There is nothing Mrs. Alexander likes better. Oh, yes, we had the Honorable Babble-Byrne when he was in this country, and Dr. Cayl-garde, you know, he put up with us when he was in Cleveland. Very pleasant, meeting these men on familiar terms."

Titus Fletcher protested that he belonged in no such class, but his old friend overbore his diffidence and carried the day.

In a few moments they started together for the station to take the next train to Cleveland, Mr. Fletcher carefully carrying his own hand luggage,

which Dr. Alexander had urged him to have sent forward by express.

"I have some rather valuable specimens in this little case," he replied; "things which could never be replaced in this country. I don't like to trust them out of my own hand, not even in my trunk," and so with obvious access to his "cheerful faith that all which he beheld was full of blessings," Titus Fletcher strode along beside his distinguished friend with a manner quite youthful and debonair.

It had been speedily arranged between them that the missionary should give a lecture on certain phases of his life in India at Alexander's church on the following evening. As the fast express train which they were about to take would bring them into Cleveland by seven o'clock, in time to be present

at the mid-week prayer-meeting, it would be possible to make suitable announcement of the lecture in spite of its impromptu character.

“Besides,” remarked Dr. Alexander easily, “I can fix it all right any way through the morning papers to-morrow. I am hand-in-glove with the editors of all our leading dailies. I tell you, Fletcher, there’s little that cannot be managed in this country nowadays, given twenty-four hours. We move at a somewhat more rapid pace than in the old days before you went to India.”

As they travelled on by the swift express, Titus Fletcher alluded with much feeling to a letter he had received from his friend inclosing a personal remittance of twenty-five dollars, in the last famine year.

“I tell you, George,” he said, shaking

his head with solemn emphasis, "it hurt me to take that money. I should have sent it back if I could ; but, my dear friend, the people on my compound were literally starving, and rice a rupee a sair, but I know that noble gift meant real sacrifice to you and yours. You said very little, my dear fellow, which was like you, but I could read between the lines. We went through our early struggles together, and I recognized your generous heart, and knew you had not changed in all the years which had come between. Words were cold to express my gratitude," and as he spoke Titus Fletcher's eyes grew dim.

Dr. Alexander silenced further expression with large, magnanimous protest, a gratifying sense glowing in his consciousness that there had been sac-

rifice in the case, as he vaguely recalled sending that twenty-five dollars to India instead of treating himself to a coveted edition-de-luxe of the Rubaiyat. To be sure, the Rubaiyat had come later. But that was another story.

As the afternoon passed, Alexander experienced a vivid perception of the almost incredible disparity between Orientalism as represented by Titus Fletcher and by the Sage of Naishapur. For himself, he had reached that desirable maturity where he could put himself at the view-point of either. He could sympathize alike with the man who cried:—

“Would you be happy? Hearken then the way:
Heed not to-morrow, heed not yesterday;
The magic words of life are Here and Now—
O fools! that after some to-morrow stray,”

and with the homely, careworn man by

his side, whose whole theory of life was to bear about always in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in him.

THE ALEXANDERS' GUEST

II

THE ALEXANDERS' GUEST

WHEN the gentlemen had been received in the well-appointed brownstone residence of the Alexanders in Cleveland that night, two pretty girls, Evelyn and Clara, fled into the library to pour out upon their mother a torrent of laughing questions.

"*Why* does papa's old classmate carry a cake box around with him?"

"Is it his luncheon that he has in it? Oh, dear, why should he need such a large luncheon? He looks quite lean."

"Oh, I know, Evelyn; it must be his portable 'bahth'! Don't you remember

Mr. Babble-Byrne brought his with him? It was larger, though."

"Don't be absurd, girls," said their mother; "Mr. Fletcher has spent so much of his life among the English residents in India that he has naturally adopted their ways. They always travel with those hideous tin satchels. I noticed them often when I was abroad last year. But I can't help wondering how long Mr. Fletcher's visit is likely to last. It has come so very unexpectedly you see."

"Very," responded Clara emphatically.

"Haven't you had a chance to ask papa about it?" inquired Evelyn.

"No, we have not had a moment alone yet, and, of course, he will have to hurry right from dinner to the church."

"But what great difference does it make, anyway, mamma?" asked Evelyn.

"Why, you see, I am thinking about the dinner party on Friday evening," returned her mother musingly. "It is not exactly the time one would have chosen," and she hesitated, while Clara exclaimed:

"Oh dear me, how awkward! But this is only Wednesday. Do you believe he will stay all that time?"

"But, mamma," interposed Evelyn, "I wouldn't mind. Since we are all so disappointed about Mr. West's not coming, why not look upon Mr. Fletcher as sent to fill his vacant place? You haven't invited any one else yet, you know. One distinguished foreigner is as good as another, and I dare say better!" and she laughed lightly.

"Oh, Evelyn," said Clara, with a

little grimace of displeasure, "how ridiculous! As if this poor old missionary could take the place of such a man as James Watson West! I never was so disappointed in my life. Here I have actually waded through every one of those long novels of his so as to be up to talking with him, and now it's all for nothing!"

"Poor baby!" mocked Evelyn; "too bad after such a feat as that. But how do you know but Mr. Fletcher may have written books, too?"

"All missionaries write dictionaries, I believe," said her mother, dropping her voice on the last words and rising to receive their guest, who just then presented himself in the doorway, followed by Dr. Alexander, who was plainly in a hurry to proceed to the dining-room.

The dinner table, set out with a brilliant array of silver and cut glass, dazzled the stranger. He took up and laid down various implements in obvious embarrassment during the first few minutes. Then, with his gentle smile, he said :

“I shall have to confess, George, that you have a sort of Rip Van Winkle on your hands; for you know I have been literally buried in the heart of India. Twenty-five years have changed things mightily in this country. While I have been reverting to primitive simplicity, you fellows on this side have been civilizing at a terrible rate. It is not that you have ‘a several sin for every sense,’ as Vaughan puts it, but you really do have a several tool for every form of food, and a man who is accustomed to one tool and one form of food

much of the time may as well plead ignorance. What, for instance, is this little trident designed for?" and he held up an oyster-fork, with a gently playful smile at the Alexander girls, which was not returned.

The Doctor worked out of the situation cleverly, and the dinner proceeded with a fair degree of comfort, until Clara Alexander brought on another strain by exclaiming:

"O papa, it's such a shame you weren't here for the play last night. It was the sweetest thing we have ever given. Every one was delighted. You ought to have seen it, Mr. Fletcher; 'Thrice Kissed,' a little comedy we gave in the parish house last night for the benefit of foreign missions, you know."

"And just think, papa," added Eve-

lyn, "we cleared three hundred dollars, and it was such fun!"

Mrs. Alexander, who was a handsome blonde woman, with a little fortune in her own right, and who appeared as young as her daughters, smiled slightly at her husband's evident annoyance, while Mr. Fletcher looked puzzled, but asked no further questions, not having scored a success in that line thus far.

"A very simple little entertainment, Fletcher," said his host, feeling uneasily impelled to explain. "Our young people work well for missions. Oh, yes, they turn over as much as five hundred dollars in the course of a year to foreign missions often. Their methods are all educative, you know, simply educative. Ours is a thoroughly missionary church," and Dr. Alexander smiled

upon his guest in a manner which dispelled all remaining cloud and uncertainty regarding the missionary and educative tendencies of the little comedy of "Thrice Kissed."

Dinner over, the gentlemen hastened to the evening service, while three thrice-dejected women met in their second-story parlor, exchanged confidence, and sought mutual consolation.

"Poor papa!" sighed Mrs. Alexander; "such a singular classmate."

"I fear that Ancient Clergyman!
I fear his skinny hand!"

drolled Evelyn,

"And he is long and lank and brown
As is the ribb'd sea-sand."

"His skinny hand wouldn't be so bad if he didn't wear such weird little cuffs," responded Clara. "Why doesn't

he wear the big, shiny kind that other gentlemen do?"

"Oh, I imagine," said her mother wearily, "he has given up all the refinements and comforts of life as a sacrifice to the heathen!"

Evelyn looked straight into her mother's face for a moment, and then said slowly, with a little shiver:

"I believe he has, mamma, really and truly. Doesn't it make you feel queer to see any one who really *means* religion?—means it as they did in the New Testament?"

"It seems rather bad form, that's all, under our American twentieth-century conditions," suggested Clara. "I must say I'm glad papa has never been taken that way."

Mrs. Alexander looked at her daughter with a curious inscrutable gaze.

Who knew better than she, when and how and why in the years that were past George Alexander had unconsciously ceased to "*mean* religion"?

"It is the sincerity, I suppose," pursued Evelyn, musingly, "which gives him that stateliness. I can't see any other way to explain how a man so antiquated and shabby can have such a fine manner, such impressive courtesy."

"I am sure I am very glad if Evelyn is impressed," returned Mrs. Alexander, with a touch of sharpness. "It is certainly wise to make the best of the situation, for you saw from what was said that Mr. Fletcher is to remain until that ten o'clock Chicago train Friday night. The dinner party, you see, is effectually covered," she added, with a certain accent of chilly significance on the last word.

Evelyn and Clara faced her with undisguised anxiety.

"A man who does not even know the use of an oyster-fork will be a *little* difficult," murmured Evelyn thoughtfully.

"What will the Raymonds think!" cried Clara, interrupting her sister, "oh, and the Marshalls! Such very, *very* unusual old classmates as papa has——"

"But listen, Clara," said Evelyn with utmost gravity, "listen, mamma dear; this is only Wednesday. Mr. Fletcher is a clever man, and adapts himself rather quickly to civilization. I could see that at once. He took quite lovingly even to the oyster-fork after the first. Now we will civilize him just as hard as we can from this time on, and by Friday night you see if he won't be

able to keep up with the best of them. He has a beautiful manner of his own to build upon, which is everything."

"I can never tell, Evelyn," cried Clara irritably, "whether you are in earnest or not. But I am sure if anything could reconcile us to not having Mr. West to dinner it would be——"

"Hush, Clara," said Mrs. Alexander. "Mr. Fletcher is our guest."

THE EIGHTH AVATAR

III

THE EIGHTH AVATAR

THE following morning, at the request of his host, Titus Fletcher brought down to the library a number of small idols and other curiosities which he carried with him to use in his lectures. Dr. Alexander had explained to him that greatly to their regret Mrs. Alexander and the girls had an engagement that evening which would prevent their being present at the missionary lecture. It was most unfortunate, but they could not absent themselves from the appointed social gathering at the house of a friend

without causing serious disappointment and inconvenience.

The missionary had waved away the explanation as wholly superfluous, and with unassuming and obliging good temper produced his treasures. The keen and humorous vivacity with which he proceeded to describe them surprised and fairly won the little group around him.

"This," explained Titus Fletcher, holding up a small, green jade image of Krishna, "is literally the dearest idol I have known. I paid twenty rupees for him. Isn't he a beauty? You would think he ought to be if you had seen him worshipped by thousands of people, as I have."

"Oh, won't you set him on the mantelpiece, Mr. Fletcher?" cried Clara Alexander, with pretty eagerness. "I

can't think which he is," she added, eying the diabolical figure with some perplexity.

"He is Krishna," replied Titus Fletcher; "one of the most popular avatars of Vishnu."

"Oh, of course," cried Evelyn; "the eighth, was he not?"

"Isn't he simply great, Evelyn?" exclaimed Clara. "Wouldn't Miss Sylvester rave over his magnificent ugliness! Is that the battle-axe in his hand that he killed the monkeys with?"

"Clara! How can you mix things up so?" cried Evelyn. "It's Rama, don't you remember, who has the battle-axe, who was the slayer of monkeys? Krishna's weapon was the plough, wasn't it, Mr. Fletcher?" and with a charming assumption of wisdom she turned to her father's old friend,

"Yes; Miss Evelyn is right," he replied, smiling in no small surprise at the detailed information of these gay girls on the Hindu heroes, and wondering uneasily if they knew more than was desirable of Krishna's exploits. "Krishna calls himself the father of the universe," he added, "as you have possibly heard, and also the mother. He was a convivial old person—the worst rogue, in fact, in the Hindu gallery."

"But you know, Mr. Fletcher," said Evelyn, with a cold little smile of reproof of such flippancy, "we have learned in the series of Lenten Lectures we are attending this season, how beneath all these symbolic forms and the popular parables which the ignorant accept, perhaps literally, there is the purest and most elevated monotheism."

"Oh, it is simply beautiful! If only

you could have heard our Swami before he went !” murmured Clara Alexander ardently.

“What is simply beautiful, my dear young lady ?” began Titus Fletcher, a plait of perplexity appearing between his eyebrows. Krishna he knew, and Swamis many, alas, also ; but what had they to do with Lenten Lectures ? with meditation on the Cross and Passion of the world’s Redeemer ?

Seeing the conversation steering straight upon the shoals, and ready to bite his tongue with vexation that he had not warned the girls to keep still about their ridiculous Hindu metaphysics, Dr. Alexander swiftly interposed with the question :-

“By the way, Fletcher, I have been meaning to ask you so many times about your daughter—let me see, have

you more than the one? I am ashamed to have forgotten."

"Only one, now," replied Titus Fletcher, an irrepressible quiver of pain crossing his face. "Three lie in small graves in the mission yard in Haidarabad." Of another grave beside the three he did not trust himself to speak. "Gertrude alone is left to me," he added, clearing his throat, and then with a brave smile—"and I have only seen her once—that was three months ago—since she was a little child."

"She has been educated in this country, then?" inquired Mrs. Alexander with cold but courteous interest.

"Yes, ma'am," replied Fletcher, unaware that this antiquated form of address gave his hostess a peculiar sense of irritation.

"Pardon me, Mr. Fletcher," she said,

and the tenderness which had softened her face as she had listened to his simple allusion to his loss faded from his sight. "I can never quite understand how it is that our missionaries bring themselves to these cruel separations from their children. It is unnatural. I could not do it—it would be simply impossible; I suppose I am not made of the true heroic stuff."

"Perhaps, dear lady, if you had once been in India, if only for a little while," said Titus Fletcher quietly, but with a stern undercurrent of feeling which gave Evelyn Alexander the same shiver she had experienced once before; "if you had been placed under the conditions which surround our families—conditions of which I cannot speak in this presence—you would understand, would even sympathize."

“Yes,” he said, rising and forcibly striking a lighter and less strenuous note, “Messrs. Krishna, Siva, and company make certain of us a good deal of trouble first and last; taking us away from the pleasures of home, to begin with, and taking the pleasure of home (for even missionaries count their children such) away from us to end with. A bad lot, my dear Mrs. Alexander, a bad lot! Let us get them out of sight, since, thank the Lord, here we can!” and Titus Fletcher, preparing to put away his curios, lighted first, with his long, lean fingers, on the green jade image of Krishna.

“Oh, please, Mr. Fletcher,” cried Clara Alexander coaxingly, “would you be willing to leave that figure there on the mantel for to-day? I am simply wild to show him to some of the girls;

and I rather expect Miss Sylvester, the lady who lectures to us, don't you know, on Hinduism, to call this afternoon. She would be so interested, and the girls would give anything to see a real live Krishna—I mean one which had really served the people themselves as an aid to worship."

Titus Fletcher bowed. It was a stiff, old-fashioned bow, and his dark face wore a look of infinite perplexity, but there was something courtly and fine about him, nevertheless, as he said with utmost gentleness:

"I shall be delighted if I can in any way serve you or your friends, Miss Clara," and so retreated to his room alone. To what end he was to serve the daughter of his old comrade was plainly not as yet clear to him.

That evening, as might have been

foreseen, when Titus Fletcher began to set forth and dispose his illustrative specimens of the Hindu economy in the lecture room of Dr. Alexander's church just before the hour of meeting, he discovered that the Krishna had been forgotten and left behind. Hastening back to the house, which was close at hand, he started to enter the library, but drew back on the threshold in surprise and confusion. Three beautiful creatures, with naked shoulders and arms, dazzling ornaments and billowing draperies, filled all the space before him. Recognizing his hostess and her daughters, and feeling himself an untimely intruder upon this unexpectedly brilliant scene, Titus Fletcher retreated into the hall, and, standing with averted head, murmured: "Pardon me, I beg of you! The Krishna, if it is not too

much trouble. You will find it on the mantelpiece."

An instant later there was a rustle of much silk, and some one stood before him—some one by no means abashed—who held out the imperturbable Krishna with a cheerful word of regret for his trouble. It was Mrs. Alexander, and the missionary from Haidarabad, as he received the image from her hands, blushed darkly through the sallowness of his sunken cheeks, and made haste to return to the church.

He did not know it, but that blush was never forgiven.

The lecture that evening placed Titus Fletcher at a slightly new angle to Dr. Alexander. He wondered uneasily and increasingly as he listened to his unpretentious friend, whether,

after all, he had exactly covered himself with glory in ruling him out from addressing the Buffalo Convention.

This was not because the missionary developed any extraordinary gifts of eloquence or oratory, or even that he proved himself possessed of that quality of "magnetism" supposed to be indispensable for success with American audiences. Neither did Titus Fletcher seek to work upon the emotions of the company, to "wallow in the pathetic," as Stevenson pungently puts it. He had, it was true, a singularly quiet fashion of speech and a certain unconscious scholarly quaintness of phrasing, which carried with them an indefinable charm. What moved George Alexander, however, and perhaps moved his people yet more, was the obvious, irresistible fact that he had a message—

a message which absorbed the man himself so completely that all question and cavil regarding his peculiarities of person, of dress, or of manner suddenly became utterly irrelevant. Those who listened realized with quickening pulses that this quiet, wayworn man, with his sorrowful eyes and his gentle smile, was one who in very truth, not merely in theory, counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.

Not all, to be sure, felt this in equal measure.

At the close of the address the crowd, as usual, gathered around the curios, since it is the symbol which always makes quickest appeal, while about the missionary himself was grouped a smaller number. These persons, however, as the pastor quickly observed,

were the men and women of finest spirit in his flock. He noted, further, that on all their faces was the touch of deepest reverence and that in many eyes were tears.

Alexander was pleased at the impression his old friend had made ; proud of the "success" of the impromptu meeting. The attendance had been gratifying, the lecture of a high character, whether manner or matter were regarded. He liked to have things in his church "succeed." He liked to see Fletcher appreciated and all that. Nevertheless, there was a faint stirring at his heart which he could not himself have defined, as he read the tokens of a new and peculiar experience on the faces of his parishioners.

"I don't quite understand what moves them so," he was thinking as he stood a

little behind the missionary, looking on. "If he had told pathetic stories or appealed to their emotions—" Just then he was interrupted.

"I want to thank you, Dr. Alexander, for giving us this chance to hear Mr. Fletcher." It was a beautiful, matronly woman who spoke, turning from the group and extending her hand to him. She was the wife of one of his leading men, herself a person of great influence.

Alexander smiled his kindest, most generous smile.

"Why, you know," he responded, "I simply captured him there at Buffalo. I was bound my people should hear him."

"He has done to-night the greatest thing for some of us which it seems to me a man could do," replied the lady gravely. "He has made the teachings

of Christ credible as a working force in the world."

"And you had fancied them incredible?" cried Alexander quickly.

"Almost."

THE OCCULT

THE OCCULT

“THE Eternal Parent, wrapped in her ever-invisible robes, had slumbered once again for seven Eternities.”

(“Tolerably long nap,” a Cynic on the outskirts of the audience commented under his breath.)

“Time was not, for it lay asleep in the infinite bosom of duration.”

“The seven Sublime Lords and the seven Truths had ceased to be, and the Universe was immersed in Paranishpanna to be outbreathed by that which is and yet is not.”

(A plainly dressed and plainly un-

enlightened woman, who had listened thus far in pathetic bewilderment, brightened up a bit at this, and whispered to the friend who had brought her, "Well, you can see she believes in immersion, anyhow! I like *that*.")

"*Which is and yet is not*," re-affirmed the speaker, over-riding the whisper with some severity.

"NAUGHT WAS!"

(The awe-struck silence which greeted this colossal truth was broken by an inarticulate murmur. Some one whispered to some one else that the Cynic had used the objectionable term, "Tommyrot," but this could not be confirmed.)

"The last vibration of the seventh Eternity thrilled through Infinitude and

forth issued the Secret of Secrets, the word of glory, the mystic

“OM!”

The priceless privilege of listening to this bathos had been secured to Titus Fletcher by the payment of one dollar at the door to an elegant female, who had received the humble offering with negligent condescension, as showing a marked inferiority in the offerer to the holders of course tickets. Nevertheless, she had, without further initiation and ceremony, indicated that it was his, Titus Fletcher's, to tread that mystic circle where occult truth was being administered to the elect.

It was the day following his missionary address at Dr. Alexander's church. He had spent the early afternoon in a

downtown reading-room, and, walking home to save car fare, he had chanced to note in passing, at the entrance of a handsome building given over to studios, club rooms, and the like, a dignified, smallish placard bearing this inscription :

“Miss Sylvester’s Friday Afternoon Lenten Lectures on ‘The Message of the Orient to the Occident.’”

“Interpretation of the Metaphysical Universe by Hinduism.”

“Miss Sylvester !”

Surely this was the name mentioned twice or thrice by the daughters of his host as their teacher and guide. The lectures were evidently not private. Why not enter and listen to the message of the Orient? The impulse became irresistible, so in he went by the mystic mediation of that dollar which

he could so ill afford to spare, but which the disparaging glance of the door lady had said plainly was small compensation indeed for the privilege now his.

Dropping modestly into the first vacant camp-chair, and bending his long, thin legs at the acute angle required by that harassing piece of furniture, Titus Fletcher found himself in a large, parlor-like apartment, handsomely appointed, and well filled with fashionably dressed women. A narrow fringe of men bordered the outskirts of the company, among whom was the Cynic, who appeared to have come to scoff, and not, thus far, remained to pray.

On a richly carpeted dais, encircled with spear-leaved palms, stood the speaker, who had but just taken up her parable as he entered,—a woman of

lithe, graceful figure, with a certain air of distinction, an aquiline nose, shifting glance, and a thin, crafty mouth. She spoke in a well-modulated voice, and with a distinct and fairly successful effort after impressiveness.

With the awful syllable, "Om," Titus Fletcher, feeling that a climax had been reached which demanded a brief interval of relaxation, glanced about the company and was able soon to discern the three Alexander ladies, in goodly apparel, drinking in the occult thirstily. They had not been detained from this event as they had from his lecture of the evening before, by a previous engagement—which was perfectly natural, the good man reflected without bitterness, and proceeded to recognize here and there a face which had been in the company gathered at Dr. Alexander's

church. These ladies, as all others present (save the Cynic), appeared to have their souls drawn up to the very surface, shining out through yearning eyes, breathing on delicately parted lips and slightly heaving bosoms.

"I am He!" the words were uttered in a thrilling whisper as of deepest awe. "Is it not well named the word of glory, this word Om? And it is for every soul in this presence to realize this if you will but earnestly master the essentials of Yoga; if you will but exalt the mind above consciousness and sub-consciousness to the super-conscious state known in our philosophy as *Somali*, a state which is reached when we bring the vibrations of our souls into perfect harmony with the vibrations of the cosmic soul.

"Jesus was no doubt born, as our

revered Swami so often told you, with all the capacities and qualities of the perfect Yogi, and either by accident or the constant repetition of the word Om and the practice of other methods which we are about to consider, he learned how to realize the God within himself, and could with perfect truth declare, 'I and the Father are one!' To the Hindu such an utterance means vastly more and vastly less than to the Christian. He has always been familiar with the thought; it is part of the fibre of his historic consciousness. It is nothing exceptional. He can confidently expect in time himself to become Christ in flesh and blood on this very earth. This will occur when all the vibrations of the body and the five great ethers which reside in the body, and constitute the universe, have become perfectly

rhythmical; for there is, my friends, mark this, only one Being in the universe, and that is the universe itself.

“Ah, do not call yourselves sinners! Never was there a greater lie! Can you not hear the Swami speaking to you once again in never-to-be-forgotten accents, ‘Ye are the children of God, holy and perfect beings?’ Does not the Hebrew Scripture itself declare, ‘Ye are gods?’ Ye divinities on earth, sinners! It is a sin to call man so—a standing libel on human nature!”

There was a pause, in which the Cynic drew a long and audible breath, and the women glanced at one another with eyes full of frightened fascination.

Titus Fletcher sat immovable—his long legs apparently petrified at their painful angle, his sallow visage drawn with dismay.

Where was he? Was this Christ's country; were these Christian women, some of whom sustained the missionaries of Christ in India? The dazed perplexity expressed in his face struck the Cynic, who, bending over to catch his eye, made with his lips, without sound, the words: "It's the fashion. We have to have it."

Miss Sylvester, appearing to realize that it was not well to keep her hearers up to concert pitch too long, now relaxed her lofty and commanding bearing, and assuming a captivating smile and a conversational manner, exclaimed:

"Ah, I fear that I am giving you the truth faster than you are able to bear it! It has so long been a part of my own inner consciousness that I forget how new the occult life is to others. I

was reminded indeed of this fact this very afternoon by a simple question put to me by a charming young truth-seeker. It concerned a presentation she had seen, if I remember, quite recently, of the wonderful avatar of Krishna. 'Miss Sylvester,' she asked me in her naïve, artless way, 'is it true that the Hindus actually worship those little green jade images of Krishna?' Let me answer her question thus publicly for the benefit of you all. Possibly, here and there among the very degraded and ignorant, for some such I am sorry to say there are even in enlightened India, there may be persons who worship the image itself, but the prevalence of such worship has been grossly exaggerated. The use of the images among the Hindu people is simply as an aid to concentration, the first

great principle of Yoga. Fixing the eyes upon the representation of the great incarnation of divinity as in Krishna, or in Siva, or in Vishnu, is an essential aid in fixing the mind upon what the deity himself represents. *Is the question answered?*” with a smile of sweet appeal.

Heads were nodded with flattering emphasis on all sides, but the Cynic rose up in his corner, not far from Titus Fletcher, and asked very humbly if Miss Sylvester would be so kind as to explain what Krishna in particular represented.

Miss Sylvester bowed gracefully, but though her smile was suave, the rising color in her cheeks showed that she scented a foe.

“Certainly,” she answered promptly, “I am always grateful for questions,

but when this has been answered we must of necessity hasten on to other points, as there is so much ground to be covered in one brief hour," and she sighed prettily as who would say, "How we all must wish that I could go on *ad libitum et ad infinitum!*"

"Krishna 'is the thing to be known,' the centre of a luminous sphere of immeasurable and inconceivable splendor. His incarnation was the embodiment of strength, courage, and virile power."

"Virile is good," murmured the Cynic apart, "sixteen thousand one hundred wives during his incarnation, and one hundred and eight thousand sons, if I remember," and Titus Fletcher's lips twitched with a smile that was closely followed by a groan, for now the lady was saying: "Of course there are many of the more highly cul-

tivated Hindus who reject certain legends of Krishna's incarnation, just as among Christian nations the more cultured pass lightly over many details of the Christ myth. Indeed, there is a strong resemblance between the two cults, as any one possessing the smallest knowledge of the Hindu religion cannot fail to observe. It is generally conceded now that the Christ myth is to a large degree borrowed from the Krishna cult. The Bhagavad Gita is to the Hindu precisely what the four Gospels are to the Christian—the story of the incarnate God."

Then Titus Fletcher grew white, for all his sallow skin, and set hard his teeth, while a strange, steady light glowed in his dark, sunken eyes.

"Nowhere, let me impress this truth once for all upon you," continued the

speaker, "is the familiar proverb so continually emphasized, 'To the pure all things are pure,' as it is in India. To a foreigner of salacious and caviling spirit, there are portions of the Mahabharata which can be interpreted in base senses, but to the Hindu mind, chaste and firm in its lofty purity, and with its wide, impassive vision which sees all things as they are ('They *have* got ahead,' murmured the Cynic apart), never is it so ! The Krishna cult embodies in popular form some of the noblest conceptions which humanity has ever reached, but, like all high truths, they must be spiritually discerned. So it is throughout the whole economy of Hinduism. There are to be seen, as some of you have heard, here and there, especially in southern India, on the walls of temples and in

other places, symbolic representations which in a civilization less noble, less advanced, would be forbidden as improper. I cannot speak at length in this presence on this subject, but in a later lecture I shall seek to make clear to you that beautiful purity of Hindu womanhood, that lofty, that transcendent Hindu conception of fatherhood, which makes symbols like the Yoni and the Linga, the very crown of the whole wonderful symbolism of the Hindu religion, fit aids to its magnificent worship."

THE CYNIC EXPLAINS

THE CYNIC EXPLAINS

FOR some moments Titus Fletcher lost all three kinds of consciousness—simple, sub, and super—stunned by the shrewdly shaded lying of the charlatan before him. When he again awoke to his surroundings a voice in his sub-consciousness seemed to be inquiring what it had advantaged that he had fought after the manner of a man with beasts at Haidarabad, while to his conscious ear, the carefully trained, artificial voice was smoothly reiterating: “Harmonize the mental vibrations by concentration and all else will be given you. You

shall be known, nay, you *are* known, by your vibrations. Every vegetable, even, has its own vibrations. Meat unduly increases the number of vibrations; therefore, if you would be perfect, abstain from meat. When you desire communion with the deity, take the lotus posture; sit with legs crossed, on the floor if possible, plant the chin steadily upon the heart, and with eyes fixed upon the tip of the nose concentrate the mind upon the toes as long as possible, to tranquillize circulation. Then bringing the mind from the toes to the 'mental space,' the point where clairvoyance always takes place—that is, the space just between the eyebrows—repeat as follows several hundred times—a true Yogi thinks nothing of six thousand :—

“*Am* to the forehead, *úm* to the mouth, *im* to the right eye, *im* to the

left eye, *um* to the right ear, *úm* to the left ear, *rim* to the right nostril, *rím* to the left nostril, *brim* to the right cheek, *brim* to the left cheek——”

At this point Titus Fletcher, feeling that the brim had been reached in his case at least, rose up and stole silently but without ceremony from the room and out into the street, close followed by the Cynic.

Finding that he had a companion, the missionary turned and his eyes flashed stormily as he breathed rather than said: “He that sitteth in the heavens shall *laugh!* The Lord shall have them in derision.”

“The charlatan is always laughable to those who are not taken in by him,” replied the Cynic. “You may be sure that our friend within is not taken in by herself. She has her laugh privately,

also, at these 'flapdoodles of the ages,' as H. P. Blavatsky used to sweetly call *her* followers. This Hindu humbug is her trade, that's all."

"But the blasphemy of it!" groaned Titus Fletcher, "and the lying. The woman knows the Krishna diabolism too well not to be perfectly aware of its modern origin."

"Possibly not. Her knowledge is pretty thin," said the Cynic coolly. "She is merely a diligent skimmer, an imitator of Swamis and such like."

"Christianity, my friend," said Titus Fletcher with swift and sudden energy, bringing his long, brown right forefinger down upon the palm of his left hand; "Christianity is the highest point of vision the human mind has ever reached, or ever will reach. Hinduism is the human mind reeling as in drunken and

piteous confusion through a tangled thicket of sophistries, puerile and childish and inarticulate, save for a ray of reason and poetry here and there ; it is the human mind groping its way through a cosmogony more absurd than any fairy tale, in which the earth is upheld on the backs of elephants, and seas of curd and clarified butter figure seriously ; through a Pantheon which teems with horrible and grotesque monsters, part beast, part god, part demon—gods who consume soma by the lake-ful, and devour pancakes with insatiable appetite, not to mention exploits far less creditable. This is the Hinduism of India, which I have known intimately now these five and twenty years. The Hinduism of America I never encountered until to-day. What does it mean ? I stand astonished ! What,

who were those women? What in the name of reason do they want of that tissue of blasphemous chicanery and misrepresentation which their leader was weaving there before them?"

The Cynic regarded Titus Fletcher smilingly as he uttered these questions with the abrupt imperative of intense emotion.

"I can see, sir," he replied in his laconic fashion, "it would be surprising to one who had been out of the country the last twenty years. We have become eclectic in religion. The one thing we seek now is to be broad-minded, and the thing we most fear is to be called narrow. Hence we import Krishna and his kind."

"What do you mean by we?" asked Titus Fletcher.

"Pardon me; I used the word im-

properly, for I do not call myself a Christian, nor am I a disciple of Krishna—yet. Being a bachelor myself, the number of his wives does not impress me favorably. It is certain superficially minded Christian women who are cherishers-in-chief of this American Hinduism—women who desire to be considered broad in their culture, whose motto is, ‘Be broad, be broad, and evermore be broad;’ women who spend their time in nothing else but either to hear or to tell some new thing. The fad started with the Swami Vivekananda in 1895, and ever since our Christian land has been a happy hunting ground to the ‘twice born’ of an adventurous turn of mind.”

“But you say these are Christian women? It is beyond my understanding. What of their loyalty to Christ?”

The Cynic shrugged his shoulders. "What of the loyalty of Judas? Every man has his price. That of Judas was thirty pieces of silver."

A startled look in the face of the missionary arrested him. For a moment their eyes met solemnly.

"That of these Christian women is considerably less," said the Cynic slowly.

Titus Fletcher bent his head as if he had received a blow. When he lifted it he stood alone.

A GOOD MAN'S WRATH

A GOOD MAN'S WRATH

BORNE on then by an imperious impulse Titus Fletcher hastened with his long strides to measure the distance to the Alexander mansion. Entering, he went straight to the door of his host's study and knocked, not timidly, not apologetically, as he had knocked heretofore, but with a peremptory summons which brought Alexander instantly to the door, pen in hand, with surprise plainly impressed on his face.

Even then Titus Fletcher did not apologize, but, entering, took a chair and sat with the strange, deep glow

still burning in his eyes, and so waited until Alexander also was seated and ready to give him his attention. Then he spoke. "George Alexander, old friend, do you know where I have left your girls just now?" he asked steadily.

The other stared.

"Why, no," he answered with a short laugh, slightly offended at the brusqueness of his humbler friend. "In the street, perhaps. It is time they were coming home from a lecture about now," and he consulted his watch.

"I left them in the lecture room," Fletcher answered quietly, but with the peculiar sternness which belonged to him now and again. "I also attended the lecture."

"You!" stammered Alexander, aghast. "You!"

"Yes; I sat through the blasphemy,

bolder than ever I heard even in heathendom, and when they came to prattling the imbecilities of fakir incantations, I came out, leaving them to cultivate their powers of endurance yet a little longer. My friend, do you know what your girls are hearing? They do not—innocent children. God save them from the pantheism that woman is trying to plunge them into!”

“Oh come, come, Fletcher,” protested Alexander, “you’re putting it a little too strong! Of course, being a missionary, you look at the subject from a partisan point of view. It is perfectly inevitable.”

“Alexander,” cried the missionary, who had been stalking up and down the room, and now turned on his heel and confronted him with piercing eyes and the mastery which a supreme pas-

sion bestows, "when your wife told me that she could not have parted from her children as missionaries part from theirs, feeling plainly that the hearts of missionaries were made callous for the purpose, I could not tell her that the reason we have to send our children away from India is not the climate alone, not the lack of schools merely, but because of the foulness and corruption in thought and word and deed which are eating out the heart of India; because of obscene symbols on cars and temple walls; because of the nameless defilements of rites performed in the name of the Hindu religion; because of the taint of impurity which strikes through men, women, and children in every walk of life and in every relation. I could not keep my child at my side, sorely as my heart cried out for her,

lest her purity should be breathed upon by that foulness. And so, through all the dear years of her girlhood, those years that I yearned for with speechless yearning, bereft of all on earth save her, I have kept her here in this Christian land that she might escape the corruption of the heathen world. And now I come back to find Christian people importing with incredible zeal that very corruption into this Christian land. I sit with your sweet daughters, pure-eyed, white-souled yet, while that charlatan pleads with them and other Christian women to behold the beauty, the holiness, the transcendent purity of that mythology which has polluted heathendom. It broke my heart. I sat there, Alexander, with drops of cold sweat falling in agony from my forehead, and heard that woman tell your

wife, your children such tales as that the 'Christ myth'—think of it, old friend!—was borrowed from the Krishna cult, younger by centuries. And the heavens did not fall nor the earth open. Tell me, man, tell me, is it for your own sake, for their sake, for God's sake that you are sending them there? Do you want your daughters to be taught to talk glibly of Christ as 'a great Yogi'? Do you fancy having them worship that green jade Krishna of mine to induce an absence of ideas? I think it might be effectual."

"Why, Fletcher, I don't send them," began Alexander peevishly; but, unheeding him, Titus Fletcher went on and said his say.

"When my wife began her studies in Hindu mythology when we first entered on our work in India, our Munshi al-

ways cut out the story of Krishna as too indecent to be looked upon by a pure woman's eyes. An amorous, cowherd ruffian, Alexander, with a matter of sixteen thousand amours to his account, playing tricks on the Gopis, stealing their garments and hiding them while they bathed—this is the idealized hero your daughters are bidden to contemplate as the centre of a luminous sphere, the sole existent being, the great original incarnation of whom our Saviour,” and Fletcher's voice fell to a trembling undertone, “was but a late imitation. Alexander, as you value the souls of those children, keep them away from that crafty adventuress who is gambling away their hope of heaven for the hope of her own gains.

“But that is only the smallest part of my plea. As a Christian man and min-

ister I implore you by all that we both adore, to keep the fountain of our faith pure from this defilement. Think of us in India ! You who inherit the fruits of centuries of Christianity, have all things and abound, nor lack for any good thing, perhaps you can afford to play fast and loose with your religion ; but for us ! if we must let go the integrity of our hope in Christ we are of all men most miserable. With empty hands shall we come to our poor starving people if you tell us that the bread of life for which they long is but a stone like unto their own dead imaginations. Save Christ to us, Alexander ! We need Him in India if you do not need Him here."

The man towered majestic, prophet-like as he delivered his message—his message of the Orient to the Occident.

Alexander's florid face had grown gray and shriveled; his eyes looked sunken and dulled.

"If this is as bad as you think," he said feebly, "it must be looked into. Something must be done about it."

But as he spoke he knew with an absolute conviction that although all this should be true, and as much more, it would count as nothing beside his wife's desire to win into the inner circle of Cleveland's fashionable literary elect, among whom, for the Cynic was a true witness, the Hindu cult was then the ruling fad.

Then Titus Fletcher, looking upon the man, for the first time saw his spiritual insignificance, his moral impotence; saw the man himself beneath the stately coverings of his place and name, worldly and futile, cowed by convention

and subservient to an ambitious woman. For a moment he stared as if a newcomer had taken the polished oak chair at his friend's desk. Did George Alexander know what that strange gaze signified?

INTERRUPTIONS

VII

INTERRUPTIONS

TITUS FLETCHER betook himself hastily to his own apartment, there on his knees to intercede in prayer for the evangelization of this Christian land, and its deliverance from the curse of eclectic religion.

George Alexander, left alone, sat motionless for a moment or two at his desk. He felt suddenly grown a very old man, such an endless space seemed to stretch between the ideals of his student years and his adaptations of to-day. The old powers and passions had been conjured up forcibly by the

interview with Fletcher. Strangely enough, for an instant he felt a faint envy of this poor, wayfaring man of grief flickering up in his mind. Fletcher had kept something which he, Alexander, had lost, and, in his absorbing life, had hardly missed before—something which, he began to feel with a certain soreness of spirit, made the prevailing power of Christ in the world credible as his own ministry had not done.

Then the house door was opened, and he heard the voices of his wife and daughters in the hall below. A quick impulse of anger rose then through the confused emotions of the moment and assumed command. The primitive instinct which found expression in the Adamic double-thrust: "The woman whom Thou gavest me" does not appear to have been wholly

eliminated yet as a masculine characteristic. Alexander hastened to descend the stairs, his face gloomy and clouded.

“Holloa, papa!” called Clara, “what is the matter? You look as if something tremendous had happened.”

Mrs. Alexander had found a number of cards and notes upon the tray which she was hastily looking over.

“Something tremendous *has* happened,” replied her father with emphasis as he reached the foot of the stairs, and stood with hands in his trousers pockets confronting the three. “I wish to have an end put to this Hindu rubbish short off. I will not have my wife and daughters seen in that sort of gathering again while I am pastor of this church. I want the fact distinctly understood.”

Mrs. Alexander stared at her husband in silent amazement. He did not often interfere thus with her line of action.

"What can have happened, George?" she asked with dignity. "I do not understand you."

"I have just been given an account of the lecture you have attended this afternoon, and if half of what I have heard is true I should think you might see yourself that it is no place for Christian women."

"Who has told you about it?" asked his wife coldly, glancing at a note which she had singled out from the rest and opened.

"The Wilders were there, papa, and the Fieldings, and quite a number of First Church people," said Clara in coaxing conciliation.

“It makes no difference who was there,” said Alexander shortly. “Mr. Fletcher happened to be present this afternoon, and you can imagine how it would strike a man of his convictions.”

Evelyn’s face flushed high.

“Oh well, my dear,” said Mrs. Alexander with a little shrug of her shoulders, “if we are all to plan our lives in accordance with Mr. Fletcher’s ideas it will make quite a revolution in various directions, I should think. But excuse me, George, if we drop the subject just for the present. This note which I find waiting for me from Mrs. Raymond is marked immediate, and if you will kindly let me read it I think we may all find it of interest.”

There was a moment of silence during which Mrs. Alexander’s eyes flew over the note; the Doctor and Clara

stood expectant, but Evelyn, unnoticed, ran away up stairs.

“Yes, it is true,” exclaimed Mrs. Alexander exultantly, the little unpleasantness already forgotten, “and isn’t it perfectly delightful? James Watson West himself is to be here after all. He has made a sudden change of plan it seems and ‘dropped down’ on the Raymonds, that is the way she puts it, a little after noon to-day. He will only be in Cleveland two days, for he sails on Tuesday. She takes it for granted that she may bring him to dinner.”

“Well, rather!” cried Clara, clapping her hands. “How simply grand! Oh, mamma, to think we are to see James Watson West after all, and have him at our house to dinner! Evelyn”—and she turned to pour out her

raptures upon her sister, but Evelyn was nowhere to be seen.

“That is really very nice, my dear,” said Alexander, and he took the note from his wife’s hand and read it himself with dignified but obvious complacency. James Watson West was the literary sensation of the year in England, and in select circles in America also.

“And I am not to be disappointed after all,” murmured Mrs. Alexander, as she hastened to the dining-room to confer with her maids.

Almost at that moment Titus Fletcher, in the guest room above, was interrupted in his intercession by a timid tapping at his door.

He rose from his knees, passed his hand over his brow as if to remove the traces of his travail of spirit, and opened

the door. Evelyn Alexander, still wearing her coat and hat, stood there.

"Mr. Fletcher," she said hurriedly, her eyes searching his face with strange appeal, "I have come to ask you to forgive me for what I have done, for my part in those hateful lectures. I did not know you were there this afternoon until now, but I hated myself for listening to that woman."

"I do not think you belonged there, my dear young lady; but doubtless you did not know the nature of the doctrine which that singular person was setting forth."

"Yes, I am afraid I did," said Evelyn soberly. "I never felt it though as I did this afternoon. Suddenly our helping to sustain the lectures and all came before me as a betrayal"—here her voice faltered a little—"yes, a

betrayal of the highest—a wounding of Christ. . . .”

“In the house of His friends,” added Titus Fletcher solemnly. He held out his hand and grasped Evelyn’s kindly.

“It is good that you have seen it,” he said simply. “I know that this perception will be enough to end the thing for you.”

“Thank you for trusting me,” she said. “I am afraid it would not have done that if I had not seen you. Will you tell your daughter, Mr. Fletcher, that I am very grateful that her father ever came to our house?”

“That is very beautiful of you, dear child,” and tears filled the tired eyes. “I am leaving to-night, you know,” he added.

“Yes, and I am so sorry,” she said, holding out both her hands, and then

without further word she slipped away to her own room.

Half an hour later another knock came at Titus Fletcher's door. As he opened it this time his face was clear and bright, like that of one who has heard good news. Dr. Alexander entered the room. He was in evening dress, resplendent in ample, shining shirt front and finest broadcloth.

"Ah, Fletcher," he said in an off-hand tone, seeking to hide a trace of embarrassment produced by his sense of their recent strenuous interview, while his glance some way slipped past that of his friend, which it did not meet. "I ought to have told you before that dinner will not be until seven to-night. Perhaps you have heard Mrs. Alexander speak of the fact that she is giving a little dinner party to-night. We are to have

several rather distinguished people here, such as Professor Marshall, the Raymonds, and the English novelist, West, as it happens, who is their guest."

Titus Fletcher bowed as if realizing the privilege in store for him.

"No use," said Alexander to himself, "trying to enlighten him as to West. I don't suppose he ever read a novel in his life."

He was glancing down at his own person as he spoke again.

"I have had to put on my dress suit," and he hesitated a little, "out of deference to my guests. I don't care, you know, a rap for such formalities—but it seems to be demanded. Still it has occurred to me that possibly you might be slightly embarrassed if you don't happen to have a dress suit with you, and in that case you know," and his

wonted confident heartiness began to come back, "I shouldn't in the least mind wearing my own 'preaching suit.' That is what we used to call them in the seminary days, when we went out to the country churches Saturday afternoons, is it not?"

It had taken Titus Fletcher an instant to catch his host's point of view. He caught it, however, with a smile of gentle amusement.

"Mighty thoughtful I call that, George," he said, evidently no whit concerned in the matter. "I haven't a swallow-tail in my trunk, I confess—haven't owned one, in fact, since I graduated in '70, and I fancy I wouldn't cut much of a figure in one anyway. But that style suits you perfectly. Don't talk about changing! It is a pleasure," he added, laughing with a certain al-

most gay cordiality, "to see the fine, stately figure you make. Proud of you, old fellow! Your friends will excuse this ancient and honorable array of mine, you see, on the score that I am about to take my train," he added, the rather to allay Alexander's scarcely concealed uneasiness, as he glanced at the old-fashioned clerical suit of faded black.

"Yes, yes, very true, very true," replied Alexander hastily, "I had not thought of that. Sorry you have to leave so soon, Fletcher."

Then, almost without his own volition, he found himself adding what it had been in his purpose not to say.

"I am sorry for some things which may have surprised you since you have been with us. You have been hurt, for instance, by this new fad of Oriental-

ism that has struck the women. I am sure you meant every word you said this afternoon."

"You are right," assented his friend gravely, "I did indeed."

"But I want to say that you must not put too much emphasis upon that, must not over-estimate its importance. I don't like it any better than you do, but it doesn't go very deep, Fletcher, you can depend on that. Nothing does nowadays," he added bitterly. "We haven't time."

Then in silence he turned and walked away down the hall, the sense strong upon him that he had not been brilliantly successful in setting the matter in a favorable light.

THE BRITISH LION

VIII

THE BRITISH LION

“**Y**ES, I am sure ‘The World’s Slow Stain’ is my *favorite*. To me it is simply the greatest novel I have read in ten years.”

Mrs. Alexander had “arrived.”

Her drawing-room, suffused with fragrance of exquisite flowers and softly shaded wax lights, was filled with her dinner guests. Their number was complete, their spirits in good order; her husband was the handsomest man in the room, and no one could be a more courtly and gracious host; the girls were in good looks, and her own toilette

was perfect; and, above all, the astonishingly young, smooth-faced, careless-mannered English aristocrat, who bent his head to receive her well-weighed phrases, was James Watson West himself. Could more be desired? Not more, perhaps, but possibly less—one less. There would not be quite the originally intended number at the table presently, not the perfect balance which she liked, but that was a mere detail.

West had a civilly bored air as he lifted his head now and appeared to be reflecting how best to work out of the situation. But even this rather pleased Mrs. Alexander. It seemed to add to his distinction.

She noticed that his glance had strayed from her to the chimney-piece, in front of which Evelyn stood talking to Titus Fletcher. He looked fix-

edly and silently for a moment in that direction.

"No wonder he prefers to look at Evelyn," she thought indulgently. "She is dear to-night in that white chiffon. But she ought to be mingling with the outside guests now. Evelyn is so unadaptive, lately."

"Pardon me," the full, round English voice began, and she lifted her face to her guest, full of devoted attention; "will you be so good, Mrs. —— ah, pardon me ——"

"Alexander," interjected his hostess deftly, realizing at one instant how little she stood for, as yet, with the much-fêted foreigner.

"Certainly. How could I have been so careless? May I ask the name of the gentleman opposite us talking with the charming girl in white?"

There was an extraordinary interest in his face as he asked the question; all his careless negligence had vanished.

"The dark, thin man?" asked Mrs. Alexander, surprised. It was not Evelyn after all, then, in whom Mr. West was so interested.

"Yes. That man with the face of a saint and a scholar combined. He has not at all an American face. I cannot make him out."

"You must mean Mr. Fletcher, an old acquaintance of my husband, who chances to be with us. He is leaving on the train just after dinner," added Mrs. Alexander, with delicately apologetic implication.

"Fletcher!" James West's face was suddenly transformed by a mixture of incredulity and delight. "Is it possible that it is *Titus* Fletcher? The

missionary Fletcher? Fletcher of Haidarabad? I knew I had seen that man before, but Fletcher! It is too good to be true."

Mrs. Alexander assented amiably to all these propositions at once, concealing her own astonishment.

"Well, this is amazing," murmured West, his eyes fixed full upon the lean, sallow face of the unconscious missionary. "To meet him again at last—and here! You know the man, Mrs. Alexander?—know him well?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, Mr. West. He has been making us quite a long visit."

Several persons had now come between them and the fair girl and dark man by the chimney-piece.

"How you must have enjoyed it! He is a rare man—a wonderful scholar you know, of course you know;

but really, you must excuse me, I have not seen him in fifteen years." And with the words West left her, and she caught a fleeting glimpse of him as she passed to give her husband the signal that dinner was served. He had grasped Titus Fletcher by both hands, and the amazement and joy of his face were reflected in that of the missionary. She paused long enough to hear the latter exclaim:

"Jimmy West! I should know you anywhere. I cannot be mistaken," and the response:

"Yes, Jimmy for a fact! On my honor, I was never so pleased in my life. Now, *this* is worth coming to Cleveland for!"

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"And so you knew Mr. West before? Knew him—it must be in India?"

Mrs. Alexander asked the question of Titus Fletcher at the dinner table. She had placed him in snug quarters at her own side. James Watson West she had generously conceded to the other end of the table, where he sat beside his host.

Titus Fletcher's face was radiant. He looked almost young and positively handsome.

"Oh, yes," he said, laughing for sheer delight in the encounter. "I knew him well. Tutored the youngster, in fact, at Poona for a year or more; the jolliest boy you ever saw, and such a rascal. And now to think of his having turned out a great writer. I never was so surprised. This comes of being buried in India. I have known nothing of them for years. His father, you see, Mrs. Alexander, was Colonel

Sir Richard West, a very gallant soldier and gentleman. The family were all at Poona for a period of years until Sir Richard's death."

"Indeed," responded Mrs. Alexander with attentive courtesy. It gave her a singular sensation to hear their modest guest talking of titled people in this matter-of-course fashion. "And you were at Poona during the time. I see."

"Yes, I taught in the Sanskrit College there for a year, simply as a substitute, you know."

"How very interesting," replied his hostess with marked respect.

Down at the other end of the table, meanwhile, James Watson West was weaving his side of the story for a few attentive listeners close at hand, with the picturesque touch of the man of imagination and sympathy.

“ I suppose if you didn't know him Mr. Fletcher would strike you as almost grotesque with his gaunt visage, his ancient garments, and his super-mundane air. You would have to go to India to know what he really stands for. Why I truly believe his people there would die for him any day, and well they might ! He has died for them a thousand times. Where did I know him ? At Poona. My father was stationed there, and my mother and we older children, my two older brothers and I, were with them. There was a death in the Faculty of the Sanskrit College, as it happened, and they sent for Mr. Fletcher to fill the place for a time until they elected a man. Is he a fine scholar ? Oh, bless me, yes ! Isn't that known over here ? He is so unmercifully humble and retiring that he will never

accept the degrees and things they try to give him. Well, he came to Poona. Rather handsome he was in those days, as I remember, with a quality about him, too, that won his way everywhere, and he as unconscious and as little pleased with himself as he is now. My father was greatly taken with him, and seeing that we young scapegraces were going to the bad uncommonly fast, he engaged him to tutor us between his college hours. In that way he became almost a member of our family for a time—that is, until my father's death. I think my mother would have died, too, had it not been for him then. The best description for him is simply 'a man of God.' That made him what he was to us in our trouble.

“His was the last face we saw as we sailed from Bombay, my mother in

her mourning, broken-hearted, and we three boys. We would have taken him with us if we could. We kept up a correspondence for a few years, but you know how those things die a natural death in time. They tried hard to get him to take the Sanskrit professorship, and remain at Poona. It would have been a fine thing for him in every way, but the saint in him was stronger than the scholar, and back he went to his natives in Haidarabad. There I suppose he has been all these years, growing quainter and leaner, and more unworldly. This is his furlough, I take it, or is he retired on half-pay? I am eager to know how things strike him here in the States. I fancy he will see changes and feel himself perhaps a little at a loss. And he leaves soon after dinner, you say? Ah, what a

shame! How I wish I had known earlier in the day that he was in Cleveland!"

As they rose from the table, West, with a few words of apology for depriving the company of Mr. Fletcher's society, withdrew into the library with the missionary for the half-hour of personal and private conversation which the circumstances justified. He was excused with amiable courtesy by his hosts, who concealed their natural disappointment with very good grace.

The two men reappeared only when it was time for Titus Fletcher to leave for his train. While he ran up stairs to make ready for departure, West made his formal adieux to the Alexanders, explaining that he could not forego the privilege of accompanying his old friend to the station. A mo-

ment later, Titus Fletcher having taken most brotherly and grateful leave, the Alexander family stood in a semicircle about the house door to see him depart. Thus they beheld the lion of the occasion, the distinguished and brilliant Englishman, as he humbly bore the missionary's little tin trunk after him, and heard the latter, with a faint echo of his quondam tutor's authority, say :

“Look out there, Jimmy ; be careful. Don't shatter my idols ! ”

As the door closed upon the twain, Mrs. Alexander relaxed for an instant from her society attitude, visibly and invisibly, and a faintly bitter smile showed about her lips.

“Unexpected, at least,” she murmured.

“To think,” cried Evelyn Alexander under her breath, “that our illustrious,

long-looked-for dinner, lion and all, should turn into an apotheosis of Mr. Titus Fletcher! Honestly, I think it was perfectly beautiful!"

And they returned to their denuded dinner company.

THE PASSING OF KRISHNA

IX

THE PASSING OF KRISHNA

SEVERAL months having passed since the visitation of the Rev. Titus Fletcher to his old friend, Dr. Alexander came one November evening into his wife's little parlor with the announcement :

“You would never guess whom I saw in the street this afternoon—Titus Fletcher.”

Mrs. Alexander dropped the magazine she had been reading, and replied with a cheerfulness which did not ring quite true :

“How long will he stay? Let us hear all about it.”

"Oh, he's not coming here, my dear. In fact he left town, I suppose, at six o'clock. He sent his kindest regards to you all."

"Didn't you invite him here at all, papa?" inquired Evelyn Alexander reproachfully.

"Of course I asked him to come home with me," returned Dr. Alexander, his face somewhat clouded, "but he was obliged to leave to meet an engagement in Whitestown this evening. He regretted not seeing you, and was most appreciative of your kindness when he was in Cleveland before. The curious thing is that the man has been here in town three weeks, it seems, sick with malarial fever, and never let us know. He was taken ill on his way East, and was obliged to stop off here, and here he has remained. He said he was afraid if he sent us any word, that we might be

burdened or bothered, and he really has had everything he needed. He has not been out at all until to-day."

"Well," said Mrs. Alexander, after a moment's reflection, "we certainly could not have managed his illness here, could we? I should have been glad, of course, to send him flowers and jelly and have shown our interest. It is too bad."

Evelyn Alexander gave a queer little gasp under her breath.

"Where has Mr. Fletcher been staying?" she asked anxiously.

"In a boarding house down on Huron Street."

They looked at one another with evident perturbation.

"Huron Street!" the ladies exclaimed in concert.

"Oh, well," Mrs. Alexander summed up the case finally, "don't distress your-

self, George. You certainly are not to blame. Mr. Fletcher is, of course, a very estimable man, and I thoroughly appreciate him ; but he is peculiar, and he does not, don't you know, quite belong in our world."

Which was, in fact, a very judicial summing up of the case, although Evelyn silently noted an exception and registered an appeal.

At ten o'clock of that same evening Titus Fletcher entered the waiting-room of the railway station at Whitestown and sat down. It was a grim, repulsive room—the greasy walls partly covered by yellowing time tables ; there was a dirty floor, and a huge cylindrical stove with a dull red paunch diffusing a suffocating heat. Outside there was wind and rain.

The missionary was leaner than ever,

sallow, if possible, and more gaunt and hollow of countenance. His clerical suit showed the flight of time perceptibly, and hung loosely on his meagre limbs. The lines in his face seemed to have been graven deeper by care and disappointment. The months spent in Chicago had not lessened his sense of his own homelessness in his native land, and they had shown him ever more clearly the diluted conviction and half-hearted purpose in the church itself, which had made it possible for Hinduism and every other ism to invade its ranks.

On entering the room he deposited the familiar tin trunk on a seat and inquired at the ticket window concerning the fare to Dunkirk, but he did not proceed to buy a ticket. On the contrary, he returned to his place and for

a few moments seemed to consider a serious situation.

The situation was serious, being briefly that Titus Fletcher found himself very nearly bankrupt, having left the larger part of a not very large semi-annual stipend in the hands of a doctor, a druggist, a boarding-house keeper, and a trained nurse, in the city of Cleveland.

The magnitude of the bills of these various personages had struck the missionary aghast, but he had paid them without a murmur. With characteristic self-effacement he had sent no report of his illness to "the Board"; indeed, he had not foreseen the need of an advance. He had found himself, therefore, upon leaving Cleveland for Whitestown, where he was to deliver an address, reduced to an almost empty purse. With

full faith, however, that the customary collection would give him the needed funds for going on to certain friends in Dunkirk, he had proceeded on his journey.

But the night was bad ; the Whites town people stayed at home ; there had been no collection ; and the prospects of farther travel, or even of a night's lodging, for Titus Fletcher, were exceedingly dubious.

Weakened by illness, the gaseous heat of the stove served to partly benumb his faculties, and, instead of facing his problem in a conquering spirit, he forthwith fell asleep, leaving it to solve itself, or what was more probable, to prove itself insoluble.

He was awakened just before midnight by a hand on his shoulder, and opening his eyes he recognized in the

man standing over him the ticket agent of whom he had asked a few questions earlier in the evening.

"Come, stranger," this man was saying, "move on, move on. We shut up here at midnight. No loungers allowed here after this time."

The man was heavily, clumsily built, with a red, mottled face, a thick neck, and a ginger-colored mustache. His small, greenish-gray eyes looking out from under thick eyebrows, also ginger-colored, were not ill-natured, but simply inexpressive.

Titus Fletcher looked up into this face with his gentle, deprecating smile. He rose and bowed with grave apology; then stood uncertain, with a mild query in his hollow eyes.

"Where shall I go next?" he murmured.

"Yourself's the best judge, parson," said the other, laughing shortly. "I should think home, now, would be a good sort of place, allowin' me to suggest," he added with a kind of patronizing familiarity.

"Home?" repeated Titus Fletcher reflectively, and smiled faintly. "Yes, that would be rather good, wouldn't it?" and he looked fixedly beyond the solid flesh before him. He saw at that moment a low grave at the foot of a tamarind tree, with smaller graves beside it; an empty bungalow; dark faces with tearful eyes, and swarthy hands wrung in parting sorrow, and he almost seemed to catch far voices calling, "Come back, come back."

There was, after all, a home he could claim, though far away.

"My friend," he said, with a sudden

and manifest influx of firmness and dignity, "you are not to think meanly of me because you find me here poor and homeless to-night. A greater than either of us had not where to lay His head."

The ticket agent took off his hat with an abrupt, involuntary movement.

"That's right," he said.

Then he added, "I knew you was a parson the minit I laid eyes on you." Turning, he lifted the tin box from the seat and with some delicacy of indirection, asked, "Anywheres you'd like to have me take this 'ere chest?"

A sudden thought struck Titus Fletcher. He acted upon it with promptness born of the emergency.

"Has it occurred to you, my friend," he inquired, looking earnestly at the other, "to invest in Oriental curiosities?"

There is quite a fashion, I find, in this country now for all sorts of imported curios."

"Got somethin' to sell in nere, have you?" asked the man with evident curiosity. "No harm in lookin', stranger?"

In a moment the tin trunk was opened, and once more Titus Fletcher set out his small collection of heathen emblems before Christian eyes.

The man seized at once upon the green jade Krishna.

"Swanny, but ain't he an ugly chap!" he exclaimed. "Ain't he got the all-fireddest smirk you ever see? Say, he looks as if he'd wink at you, if you could stand it to look at his impudence long enough."

"That image, my friend," said Titus Fletcher, "represents the god of a large

portion of the human race. I bought that idol at Brindaban, after a great festival, during which it had been worshipped by over a hundred thousand people."

"I'll be blowed!" cried the man, staring in amazement. "I've heard tell that the heathen in his blindness bows down to wooden-stone, but I always took it that it would be life-size. Wouldn't that astonish Eliza?"

"Very probably."

"How much d'you ask for this 'ere one?" asked the agent after a moment, during which he had looked the collection over with the half-slighting, half-measuring eye of the possible purchaser, and had returned reluctantly to the green Krishna. "I wouldn't give much for the lot, but this one is so darned aggravatin' ugly that I should

kinder like to set it up on the mantel shelf to tease Eliza."

"I paid twenty rupees for that idol," said Titus Fletcher, patiently adapting himself to his new rôle of vendor instead of delineator of images, "and it is almost in perfect condition. A slight nick here," and he pointed conscientiously to Krishna's left knee, "is, I believe, the only imperfection. I would part with that interesting specimen for two dollars and a half," and he watched the other's face anxiously.

"Well, stranger, you've got the advantage of me," returned the agent. "I ain't not to say familiar with the market price of idols. It ain't my line. They seem to come high, seein' how small they be. Still it cost somethin', I suppose, fetchin' of 'em over. Say,"

with a shrewd question enlivening his eyes, "you're sure, be you, that this is a genuwine heathen idol? Twan't made down in Connecticut, or anywheres in the neighborhood of Boston, was it?"

"My friend," said Titus Fletcher simply, "I have told you the truth." The man nodded.

"I believe you. You look as if you'd ben in heathen lands, and as if they'd kinder drawed you through a knot-hole in the bargain."

Titus Fletcher checked an impulse to defend the heathen, seeing it involved a reflection upon his own countrymen.

"Here's your two dollars and a half," continued the agent, putting a foot on the seat and counting out the money on his broad leg thus made available.

“Two dollars and a half of good clean money for that dirty, grinnin’ idol, and I’m a fool to pay it, and Eliza’ll say so. Never mind ; yes, take it parson, you’ve come honestly by it. I guess it’s worth all I’m payin’. What did you say its name was ?”

“Krishna,” was the reply. But as he left the station to seek lodging in a wayside public house he had noticed, a sudden fear seized upon Titus Fletcher, and he hastened back to the agent, whom he found locking the waiting-room door. Turning, the man saw through the falling rain the gaunt face towering over him, full of anxious questioning.

“What’s to pay, now, parson ?” he asked. “I shan’t buy no more idols to-night.”

“My friend,” said Titus Fletcher

solemnly, "I must satisfy myself on one point, or we must cancel the sale, and I will take back the Krishna even though I should walk the streets till morning."

"Go on ; I guess if I'm satisfied you'd ought to be."

"Do you think," proceeded the missionary, "that there is any danger that in the process of time you might come to worship this graven image, you, or your wife, or your children, or your servants, or the stranger within your gates?"

"Worship that fool, Krishna?" and the agent, bracing his hands upon his substantial sides, burst into uncontrolled laughter. "He ain't such a ravin', tearin' beauty as that comes to, parson, and don't you forget it."

"Hindu idols are worshipped, how-

ever, in some parts of this country, I have found to my surprise. Pardon the needless question," and the tall figure of the missionary vanished in the blackness of the dim, narrow street.

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In a letter to that daughter Gertrude, whom he was supporting in a New England boarding school, Titus Fletcher wrote a month later:

"I have engaged second cabin passage on the steamer for Genoa, sailing January 1st. The Society agrees to send me back to Haidarabad on half-pay. I discovered during my Western trip that my home is, after all, in India. My people there love me, and not one of them but would share his last handful of rice with me. Life seems simpler there, gentler, if I may say so not ungently. Choosing between them,

the perils by the heathen seem less to me now than the perils by mine own countrymen. If I should be embarking on a longer journey to a better country, and the sea should be my grave, it would be a kindly one, and you may give God thanks for me."

Which was to say, although happily the daughter did not perceive it, that the heart of Titus Fletcher, missionary from Haidarabad, was broken.

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